

Website Series On Canadian Nationalism *(Since the 1920s)*

(Draft by the Web Editor, February 2008)

Burning issues in the Canadian movement then, and a potentially explosive if muted factor in today's politics, this debate within Trotskyism, which, although it raged out of control in the hands of the new youthful LSA/LSO leadership – its arguments on both sides never achieving the luxury of a rational discussion – is of great significance today.

Now, after a delay of over 35 years, these documents can be read by the public as well as the political Left as the issue of Canada-US relations becomes ever more acute – as the crisis of the dominant U.S. imperialism and its satellite Canadian imperialist state becomes more acute.

First, we are dealing with documents of the “debate,” which took the form of a hyped-up factional conflict leading to a split in the Canadian movement. Plenty of time for a retrospective!

Most recently added in is the final Dowson contribution from 1973, entitled “Theory is gray, but life is green” -- which coolly and in a rational way sets out the then most recent movement positions and policy towards the growing phenomenon of Canadian nationalism (an imposed consciousness, or 'nationalist sentiment' as this editor prefers to call it, since no actual “nationalist” movement as such has developed in Canada – or has found sustained expression in our politics (since the eruption of the socialist ‘Waffle’ – the left-wing within the New Democratic Party in 1969) – a remarkable lacuna in an advanced capitalist state which is also a satellite state – no doubt tied to the lacuna in the development of a rigorous Left inside our outside of the mass labor movement and its political party in this country since the 1970s).

Maurice Spector was among the first Canadian Trotskyists to analyze the basis of conditions favoring Canadian nationalist sentiment in the 1930-1940s, responding to growing national awareness at a time of generalized proletarian radicalization. At that time, it was a case of little more than a developing distinctness from, and critique of, first, prevalent US mores and jingoism – in parallel with British colonial attitudes towards Canada – including towards British ancestry Canadians – a nascent type of folk radicalism we were hardly aware of (a British culture we knew we were indifferent towards, but in the case of first generation Canucks, as well as ‘native’ youth, who were decidedly dismissive of – for instance, towards the Queen (while not hostile like those totally alienated Québécois!))

Canadian national sentiment has always been a negative we couldn't name. At the same time there was very little positive Canadianism – we were always too bashful to feel proud of being Canadian, and Canadian history, significantly, played a very muted second fiddle to English History and English Literature (there was really no such thing as Canadian history or literature in our high school curricula – and our Canadian Elite saw to that.)

Travelling abroad, we Canadians were admired for our LACK of national pride, confirmed by the very small maple leaf we wore – but this Canadian negativity was in fact a mute protest against both British superior airs and rampant American jingoism. Our ‘nationalism’ was an ‘anti-nationalism.’”

This festering Canadian ‘anti-nationalism’ was in fact more imposed on Canadians by first ‘superior’ British culture and then heavily pervading American (U.S.) culture. Major elements of American popular culture of course Canadians have absorbed and adopted, but also ranging from imperialist attitudes or conservative-reactionary rationalizations to liberal and even labor-socialist attitudes and institutions – notably industrial-unionism.

American imperialist attitudes – like the previous British ones including royalty – we have never embraced and often boycotted – thanks largely to Québécois anti-imperialist sentiment, and growing English-speaking Canadian alienation from U.S. iron-fisted diplomacy and wars. Perhaps the turning point was the first and notably refusal to fully participate in the Korean War, and the adoption by Canadian of an alternate military alliance role: our ‘peace-keeping’ role – fully supported ‘nationally’ by Canadians as appropriately distancing ourselves from the U.S. juggernaut (and by the Québécois – their ‘Van-Doos’ – more as a job-creation institution just as Blacks find careers in the U.S. military today.)

During this process the role of the Canadian government under the control of its bourgeois parties (*end of draft -- Web Ed.*)